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NOTHING HAPPENED

The Senate internal security subcommittee has wound up a year-long investigation of the death of Povl Bang-Jensen, dismissed Danish official of the United Nations, with the conclusion that it is reasonable to believe that Bang-Jensen did not commit suicide but was murdered by soviet secret police.

The theory is not a new one. There were too many unsatisfactory loose ends in the police investigation to support the easy verdict of suicide. The Senate subcommittee's report not only dwells on these inconsistencies but offers good reasons why the soviet apparatus would have wanted to get rid of Bang-Jensen.

The Danish diplomat got into hot water with the U. N. headquarters staff by insisting that he was duty bound to protect the identity of 81 Hungarian witnesses who testified in confidence to him during the official U. N. inquiry into the bloody suppression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956. Russian tanks and divisions crushed the rebellion.

Altho he lost his job with U. N. because of his refusal to turn over confidential files containing the testimony of the witnesses to the U. N. secretariat, which had Russian Communists as well as soviet sympathizers in its employ, Bang-Jensen carried his point by burning the evidence in the presence of U. N. officials.

The Senate report mentions this episode as one reason why Bang-Jensen incurred soviet enmity. Another was that Bang-Jensen had come into possession of evidence which would have exposed communist infiltration both of the Washington government and of various echelons of U. N., where the employees in question were American citizens.

Senators reviewed Bang-Jensen's efforts to carry this information to responsible officials of the state department and central intelligence agency, and also to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was given the run-around. The subcommittee report criticizes all concerned for "lamentable procrastination and indecision" and finds an indifference amounting to "folly."

These efforts began three years before Bang-Jensen's death in November, 1959, but he never received a hearing. The state department was unresponsive. The CIA and FBI said they could not intervene without a direct request from the secretary of state and attorney general, neither of whom ever acted.

While this inertia may seem all but unbelievable, there are precedents establishing that it is in the Washington pattern. On Sept. 2, 1939, the late Whittaker Chambers, who abandoned communism after serving for years as a soviet courier who collected secret documents from Communists and soviet agents in the New Deal for transmission to Moscow's spy apparatus, tried to lay his story before government officials.

He obtained an interview with Adolf A. Berle, assistant secretary of state for security matters, and presented to him a catalog of leading Communists and soviet sources in the Washington government. Among them were Alger Hiss, Lee Pressman, John Abt, Nathan Witt, Charles Kramer, Laurence Duggan, Julian Wadleigh, Noel Field, Lauchlin Currie, and many others, some of whom had left federal service, while others were still in the bureaucracy.

When Berle placed this information before President Franklin Roosevelt, his account was that Roosevelt merely laughed and told Berle, in effect, to "go jump in the lake." Nothing was done, and it was not until nine years later that Hiss and others in the communist apparatus in Washington were exposed by Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley, another witness who had renounced communism, in testimony before the House committee on un-American activities.

Washington has a singular lack of curiosity about Kremlin operatives within government ranks, altho they may be capable of great damage to the nation. The Bang-Jensen story only fortifies the experience with the Hiss group, but in each instance the reason for apathy—unless it can be ascribed to a desire to avoid political embarrassment—is a mystery.